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AN AMERICAN VIEW

BY STEPHEN BONSAI

IN the days of Uncle Toby it used to be Flanders, but for fifty years at least the cock-pit of Europe has been the Balkans. And for many years before this, the religious differences and the racial antagonisms of the odds and ends of peoples, the remnants and the fragments who here survived the invasion of the last Asiatic Horde, made South-eastern Europe a most unpleasant place to dwell in. Some outspoken observers of the situation by which the submerged Christians found themselves confronted even went so far as to say that the state of affairs was a disgrace to Christendom. But the Church, the Western Church at least, paid no more attention to these criticisms than it had to the cries for assistance that provoked them. Of course from time to time the European Concert intervened somewhat lamely and somewhat haltingly. Perhaps the intention was better than the performance. But it seemed to many people watching the conflict from many different angles that the majority of the intervening powers were most concerned, not in stopping bloodshed or in preventing massacres, but in securing postponement and delay. The diplomacy of Western Europe was frequently taxed to hold back the young and vigorous nations which have arisen among the Christian *rayahs*, overrun five hundred years ago by the Horde, the seed of the blessed Balkan martyrs, Saint Cyril and Saint Method, and postponed again and again the probate of the will which the Sick Man of Europe, and of Asia, too, for that matter, has drawn up so craftily, apparently with the single purpose of introducing discord into the plans and councils of his would-be beneficiaries.

A very cautious English correspondent cabled from Montenegro early last month the following most conservative statement; it might well have come by mail: "War

has not yet been declared, but it can be said without fear of contradiction that a state of war has prevailed on the frontier for the last week." Now, as a matter of fact a state of war has existed on the Montenegrin frontier, on the Servian border, in Macedonian fastnesses, and on the high hills of Albania for a century past. These mountain men have carried on a struggle that is without a parallel either in the story of race wars or religious persecutions. And it was Gladstone who wrote in 1895: "In my deliberate opinion the traditions of Montenegro exceed in glory those of Marathon and Thermopylæ and all the war traditions of the world."

The Western reader will have to grasp the fact that war is not a new thing to the combatants, and that they have generations of belligerency behind them, before he can approach the problem of the present situation with any hope of grasping it. The diplomats of Western Europe always dreaded the "Question" entering upon a new phase, and the radical suggestion that was now and again made by unauthorized and wholly irresponsible persons to the effect that the suffering Christians should form a coalition and drive the Turks out of Europe was regarded as anathema, a silly and most reprehensible attempt to bring about a world war.

So the situation dragged on. The world peace was preserved, but every summer there was a slaughter not only of fighting-men, but of innocent women and children; and hardly a year passed but what the cock-pit of Europe was converted into a human shambles that stank of the Middle Ages. Of course, Western Europe did not enjoy this state of affairs, and Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, probably considered that the sacrifice of a quarter of a million of men which it had made in 1878 to bring about livable conditions was all that would be expected of her. Often the ambassadors of the Western powers at Constantinople would admit that the state of affairs was bad, though exaggerated by report. The flattering unction that flows from this word exaggeration the ambassadors always laid to their souls ever ready to be comforted. "Conditions are terrible at times," it was admitted, "but after all a radical solution of the vexed question might mean a great war, and this might be disastrous to our interests, to our political and commercial aggrandizement. War certainly does not fit

into our present plans." So argued the statesmen and so talked the ambassadors in Stamboul. And the massacres continued; men, women, and little children were set upon and murdered, sometimes in the name of the Crescent and, alas, sometimes in the name of the Cross. But let us be just—the peace of the world was preserved and the business in arms was good.

Though they were slow, the young nations of the Balkan Peninsula learned, at last, to be quite as selfish as the great powers had been, and determined to help themselves. A military coalition was formed and the trap was sprung at an opportune moment. Turkey, the traditional enemy, was weakened by the war with Italy, and even more so, it would appear, by the well-meant efforts of the Young Turks to modernize her institutions and rejuvenate her form of government. The old autocracy was to become a modern state with representative institutions. All the old prejudices were to be thrown overboard and a Greek or an Armenian, a Georgian or a Jew, was to have equal civic rights and equal duties and responsibilities with the Ottoman Turks of the conquering race. It is now apparent the reformers have made the fatal mistake that Lincoln described as "swapping horses in the middle of the stream," and as a result they run extreme danger of being washed away, if not of drowning.

Some years ago—October, 1903—I wrote an article for this REVIEW entitled "The Gordian Knot in Macedonia," describing the conflicting interests that were and are still at work in that unfortunate province. Here the claims and the pretensions of the Greeks, of the Bulgarians and the Servians conflict at almost every point to-day as then, and here they will have to be compromised or otherwise adjusted before peace can descend into the cock-pit of Europe, even if the military coalition is successful in expelling the Turk.

When the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, ruled in Stamboul his policy was simplicity itself. His was a programme for self-preservation; later the deluge might come, but it is only fair to say that it did not come in his day. The schools might be closed and the most famous mosques, refused the most essential repairs, might threaten to collapse. The school-teachers could starve and the priests could beg their bread from door to door. His foreign embassies might be besieged by duns as they were, and his personal representa-

tives abroad might be seen traveling second-class with frayed trousers and rusty coats, at least from Zemlin, where in the last generation Europe used to end, on the way to the Capitol to collect the arrears of salary and appointments that were due them. But by hook or by crook, by hundreds of devices which it would take too long to relate, this Sultan always maintained three hundred thousand excellent troops between his residence at Yildiz and the northern frontier, between him and the little nations that were growing strong and working for, not merely dreaming of, the day when a war of *revanche* would have some chances of success. Abdul Hamid placed the rifle above the man, and in the sequel it proved an excellent military policy in a world where self-preservation rises above every other consideration.

It would lead me too far afield to describe even some of the details of the situation in which the Turks were caught napping, or rather swapping horses while crossing a dangerous stream. One significant fact will have to suffice. The diplomatic cards in the game which has resulted in the disastrous war which we are now witnessing were held for the Turks, not by Tewfik Pasha or some other tried servant of the Porte, but by Norighian Bey, an Armenian, a member of a race long oppressed by the Turks. He may have been perfectly loyal to the new régime that honored him, but it must have been very difficult for him to be so; and while it may and probably was wholly undeserved, the want of confidence which the Turkish fighting-men, the men behind the guns who had to bear the brunt of the fighting, had in such leadership cannot be exaggerated. Many of them, perhaps the most intelligent of them, thought they were betrayed before a gun was fired.

While Turkey was in the throes of transition and her administration, military as well as civil, at sixes and sevens, King Ferdinand and his able Premier, M. Gueshoff, succeeded in forming a military coalition, and at a signal, given at a most opportune moment, Greece and Servia, Bulgaria and Montenegro, threw themselves upon the ancestral enemy so totally unprepared for the contest. I say military coalition, I think, advisedly, though it is to be hoped that a stronger tie than one forged by the mere military exigencies of the struggle is holding the allies together. In an illuminating article entitled "The War in the Balkans," in this number of the REVIEW, a very competent

writer suggests that the Bulgarian Premier has done more than this, that he has successfully compromised the conflicting claims of neighbors so lately hostile, as well as brought to a fulfilment the dream of a united attack upon the "unspeakable Turk." If M. Gueshoff has done this he has accomplished a miracle and worked a wonder worthy of the wonder-working days and comparable only to the best achievements of Saint Cyril.

We who are not initiated into the details of the miracle and cannot hope to be for some weeks to come at least, can only examine the conflicting claims of the States composing the Balkan League and try to figure out how the very striking differences hitherto existing can be reconciled and how the conflicting claims can be adjusted. Of course, these claims to the conquered territory that has now practically been seized by the allies were advanced weeks, months, and even years ago. But man, be he Bulgarian or Servian, is not prone to claim less in the hour of victory. From the object-lesson which they are engaged in furnishing an astonished world, the allies may perceive the advantages of that unity of action by which alone they have accomplished so much. And they may be tempted—they certainly should be—to continue the alliance and prolong the period of common action against the very trying days of diplomatic battle that are now dawning for them. Such an alliance, however, would require great mutual forbearance and entail political sacrifices to the individual States that would be difficult to bear. But it would safeguard them against many worse evils from the utter confusion that will overtake all their plans if but one of the Balkan States can be induced, we will say by a great power, to seek selfish advantages or if the statesmen called to positions of such eminence and responsibility should attach undue weight to the almost hysterical utterances of the various Greater Bulgarian, Pan-Serb, and Pan-Hellenic agitators who are dreaming of empires that could never be fitted into southeastern Europe even though it were as large as Asia, and who are professionally averse to, and temperamentally incapable of, compromise.

The literature of the renaissance of the Christian States in the Balkans is filled with conflicting testimony and bristling with contradictions. Of course, the refinding and re-locating of the old boundary line of the ancient kingdoms

which disintegrated centuries ago, or which the Horde trampled under foot, is a task of almost superhuman difficulty. There never was, apparently, any boundary-line agreement as to the confines of the Greek Empire, of the Bulgarian Empire, or of the old Servian Empire, and the actual frontiers were, perhaps, never fixed and certainly they were never long stationary. They occasioned many bitter disputes and many bloody wars. To-day, when the old title-deeds of past glories and ancient possessions are being renovated and brought into the light of day, they are, naturally, studied by the ambitious, though disinherited, children of these vanished realms in an optimistic, not to say chauvinistic, spirit. It may be said that the boundaries which these partisans fondly hope are on the point of being re-established conflict at every point where they do not overlap. And neither the Serb nor the Bulgar nor the Greek is inclined to accept any boundaries for the kingdom which he seeks to restore other than those which it perhaps enjoyed in the days of its greatest power and expansion.

Even to-day, with the victory not secure and the work of the military coalition not complete, discordant notes are heard amid the pæans of victory. And a cloud already larger than a man's hand can be discerned overhanging Belgrade. Here M. Pastich, the Servian Premier, has communicated his plans for a greater Serbia to the correspondent of the *Temps*, as he did to me three years ago with even greater fullness. "Servia wants the ports of St. Giovanni di Medua, Alessio, and Durazzo on the Adriatic Sea, which the Servian Empire possessed in the Middle Ages and by which she was territorially related to the rest of Europe."

Here we may have the initial clash, though there are a dozen more serious ones in the background. With these words the Servian Premier abolishes a free Albania, cuts off Austria from the *Ægean*, and apparently takes quite a juicy slice out of that Greater Bulgaria which the soldiers of King Ferdinand have been fighting for gallantly.

To understand the Bulgarian aspirations to-day or their past history you must visit the city of Tirnovo on the Jantra. The glory has departed from this "citadel of thorns," this ancient crowning city of the Bulgarian Tsars; but in the church of the Forty Holy Martyrs, that Westminster Abbey of a patriotic people, inscriptions can still be read as to the metes and bounds of the ancient kingdom which have

the force of Holy Writ to the young men who must make or mar Greater Bulgaria. I once visited this interesting place with M. Stambouloff when he was Premier of Bulgaria, and with him read the testament engraven on stone of the great autocrat which the young Bulgarians regard as the covenant of their claim. It runs:

"In the year 1230, I, John Asen II., Tsar and Autocrat of the Bulgarians, obedient to God in Christ, son of the old Asen, have built this most worthy church from its foundations and completely decked it with paintings in honor of the Forty Holy Martyrs by whose help in the twelfth year of my reign, when the church had just been painted, I set out to Rumania to the war and smote the Greek army and took captive the Tsar Theodore Komnenus with all his nobles.

"And all lands have I conquered from Adrianople to Durazzo—the Greek, the Albanian, and the Servian lands. Only the towns around Constantinople and that city itself did the Frank hold; but these two bowed themselves beneath the hand of my sovereignty, for they had no other Tsar but me. And I prolonged their days according to my will as God had so ordained. For without Him no word or work is accomplished. To Him be honor forever, Amen."

"What a great man he was!" commented Stambouloff, his dark and rather dull features brightened by the vivid touch of enthusiasm, and then, after a hot discussion over the translation of the inscription, in which I had taken no part for the best of reasons, died away, he added, talking slowly and weighing every word, "I am working to-day to the end that some Bulgarian, some son of this soil, may come into his patrimony and rule over all the brethren just as did the Tsar John."

I only indicate here one of the possible points of contact and of friction, but one of the many potential causes of discord in the camp of the present Balkan coalition. There are many others and perhaps more serious ones inherent in the situation and inseparable from any attempt to solve the Macedonian question and distribute its provinces according to the race and the Church of the inhabitants. We must not forget that where the Tsar John went there the Greater Bulgarian of to-day would go and would stay, the Servian Premier notwithstanding. While a spirit of compromise and the exercise of common sense may conjure all the dangers to the peace of Europe which cannot and certainly should not be concealed, it is quite clear, unless King Ferdinand's cautious as well as shrewd diplomacy prevails, and he is able in the hour of victory to restrain his people, there are other wars brewing in the cock-pit of Europe.

Every child in Bulgaria drinks in with his mother's milk the story of the downfall of the ancient Bulgarian Empire, and at his mother's knees promises to work for its restoration. And he knows how the downfall came about, and he has his own ideas as to how the new and greater kingdom is to be built up. All this child's prattle does not help to make the Serbs and the Bulgarians to-day better allies and better friends. For although the Tartars were overrunning the land and the attitude of the Greeks was menacing, it was the Serbs who a century before their own dark day on Kossovo field overcame the Bulgars and for a season achieved and maintained the hegemony of the Balkan States. The Tsar Michael's shameful treatment of his Serb consort was the occasion rather than the cause of the collision between the two Slavic people. The Tsar Michael had formed a league of Greeks, Rumanians, and Bulgarians against the Serb King, Stephen Ūros the Third, and boasted that he would easily overcome him. But the Serbs fell upon the Bulgarian army caught napping at a place which is probably the present Kōstendil on June 28, 1330, a day still remembered with sorrow by patriotic Bulgarians, although they do not wear mourning for it as do the Montenegrins to this day in sad remembrance of the battle of Kossovo.

There is no country in the world where the military lessons of the Adrianople campaign could be studied and taken to heart with more profit than in these United States. Despite all the talk of international tribunals and the preachments of peace, the habits of the nations of the world have never been more predatory than they are to-day. And it cannot be denied that at this juncture our great cities and our great store-houses of almost fabulous wealth are no more adequately defended, and our defenders no more numerous in relation to our increased population than they were in the days when the British captured Washington.

The military record of the Turkish soldier is a proud one. His devotion to duty, his sobriety, his capacity for suffering, and his willingness to meet death half-way and, indeed, to go to seek it, are both traditional and undisputed facts. Now in a few weeks he has been overwhelmed by the Slavs, who until recently touched the ground with their foreheads before him, and by the Greeks, who, in 1897, made such a poor showing when brought face to face with the sturdy soldiers of Edhem Pasha.

How, then, can the unexpected result be accounted for. Has the Turk become a coward overnight? Has the leopard changed his spots? There is every reason to believe from the unanimous reports of eye-witnesses that such is not the case. Newspaper paragraphers are also having their jests at the expense of the Turkish fortifications which the invading army have had no difficulty in rushing or in turning. But as a matter of fact these fortifications stand to-day, in whosoever possession they may be, as nearly, if not quite, the last word in the art of defense. They were designed by Brialmont, the great Belgian engineer, and they have been developed and strengthened by the Germans under von der Goltz Pasha. The soldiers were excellent, the fortifications could not be improved upon; but it is quite apparent there was no organization, much less co-ordination, in the Turkish army. The lesson taught at the expense of many thousands of lives and the fall of an Empire is that you cannot hoard your military resources as you can and should put money in the bank against the evil rainy day. You must use your army under conditions approximating those of war or it will degenerate into an unwieldy mob prone to panics and ineffective in emergencies.

Again, it proves that fortifications, however admirably designed, will not stop an invading army unless they are manned by trained men. The best artillery is mere scrap unless you have ammunition with which to serve it and unless you have your transportation organized so as to place your ammunition where it will be most needed.

Colonels who have never seen a regiment, much less led one, and generals who are only acquainted with brigade formation from technical or picture books, recruits who do not know how to shoot, and miscalled reserves who have never served with the colors, are all factors in this complete overthrow and confusion of one of the great fighting races. The new régime had not spent its money exclusively at Essen or at the Creuzot forges. The artillery that they had rusted in sheds. The rifles were stacked in magazines and armories. Mounts for the cavalry had to be caught. In Turkey an army had to be improvised to meet the advance of the Balkan coalition, and this improvisation, though attempted by perhaps the most military people in Europe, was a ghastly failure, as such attempts always must be.

STEPHEN BONSAL.